

---

436 278 1001

## Mindy Baha El Din (née Rosenzweig) 1958–2013

With the tragically early passing of Mindy Baha El Din, on 18 March 2013, Egypt has lost one of its finest and most active advocates for natural history conservation, while the migratory birds that bi-annually pass between the continents of Europe and Africa have lost one of their greatest allies. Mindy Baha El Din was renowned for her immense energy and drive, and commitment to environmental issues within and outside Egypt. She was a force of nature in her campaigning spirit—but far, far more than that, she was a force *for* Nature.

Her utter commitment was brought home as I went through my diaries, reminding me of a phone call I received from Mindy in early 2011. Much of our conversation concerned the very tentative plans we had to write a paper for *Sandgrouse* on the status of Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica* in Egypt. I had seen flocks of the species on Cairo's Zamalek Island and Mindy, although she had missed it when we visited the island together, had an array of previous sightings from other observers. But this was not just any phone call. This was on 2 February 2011, barely one week into the Egyptian Revolution, and Mindy was calling from the utter chaos of Cairo airport. It said two things about her—her total dedication to the safety and security of her young daughters Laila and Yasmine, and her complete passion for birds, especially the birds of Egypt.

It is difficult to say whether Egypt found Mindy, or Mindy found Egypt. It does not matter—the happenstance was fortuitous. Having studied Arabic and Economics at Indiana University she went on to graduate studies in ornithology at Cornell. Armed with the necessary paperwork, she joined what is now BirdLife International and found herself in Egypt. Her first major achievement, in 1988, was to establish an environmental education centre at Giza Zoo. It was an achievement of which she was justly proud, but one that she was to become increasingly frustrated about as the internal politics, corruption and incompetence of the now discredited zoo came to light.

Perhaps the defining moment of her life came in 1989, when she married Sherif Baha El Din, even at that stage Egypt's premier ornithologist and a world-class field naturalist. It cannot be



Mindy Baha El Din, in Yemen, 2000 (photographer unknown)

overstated just how proud, publicly and privately, Mindy was of her husband. Neither can it be stressed too much how proud he was of her achievements.

Throughout the 1990s Mindy worked tirelessly for, and as a vocal critic of, many local, national and international organisations. I had the pleasure of accompanying her on many field trips and it is easy to forget, in the plethora of bureaucratic achievements in environmental advocacy, what a good field naturalist she was. She had an eye certainly. I can remember on one trip her finding what I assumed was an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida* near Wadi Gimal in south-east Egypt. Mindy was not happy and stuck with the bird, which photographs eventually proved to be an Upcher's Warbler *H. languida*.

But my favourite Mindy story is from Zaranik in north Sinai, one spring in the late 1990s. We were birding by the pumping plant, an ugly concrete building with a leaking tap and small garden that provided sufficient water for a relatively luxuriant tree and precious sustenance for migrant birds. We had a wonderful afternoon's birding with, for me, two 'life' species. And then in and out of the tree's foliage I saw a sparrow different from the swarms of chirping House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, white-cheeked and chestnut-capped, it was a Tree Sparrow *P. montanus*, but Mindy was rightly sceptical. It was, she told me, only the third record for Egypt. Eventually, with the light getting low, we left. Early the following morning, with Sherif, we staked out the pumping station once more, but nothing except for House Sparrows and other expected species showed themselves. And then came a huge shout, "Look! Richard's Tree Pipit!" What made it memorable was the utter confusion of the announcement, a confusion that summarised the excitement, and despite the confusion of linguistic euphoria it was the indeed a Tree Sparrow, not a Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*, that was finally showing itself.

In recent years Mindy embraced social media and became a tireless campaigner for a several causes, not least her campaign against the Porto Faiyoum Hotel project on the northern shores of Lake Qaroun in Egypt's Faiyoum—a Protected Area. As things stand, it seems to be a final victory for her tireless campaigning and advocacy. A pristine northern lakeshore in years to come would be a fitting tribute. She was also instrumental in setting up Nature Conservation Egypt (NCE).

I have spoken earlier of the extraordinary bond between Mindy and her husband Sherif. That bond ensures her name continues. While Sherif's reputation was assured by his field skills as an ornithologist, he has made a profession from herpetology and has ensured that her name lives on through two new gecko species, *Tarentola mindiae* from Egypt's Western Desert and *Hemidactylus mindiae* from south Sinai.

Mindy died after suffering a stroke on 14 March. She is survived by her husband Sherif and by their two daughters Laila and Yasmine.

Richard Hoath

## Georges Oueda 1964–2012

434 870-1301

On 10 December 2012, after suffering a cerebral stroke, Georges Oueda passed away, aged only 48. Georges was the Director of Conservation and the Important Bird Areas (IBA) Coordinator of Fondation Amis de la Nature NATURAMA, the BirdLife partner in Burkina Faso. Georges was the single most knowledgeable expert in ornithology in his country, and known to many across the international bird conservation community.

He was born on 27 August 1964 in Peotenga, Kourittenga province of Burkina Faso. In 1982, he attended the teachers college at Tenkodogo, and then completed secondary level education at Newton Lyceum in Ouagadougou, where he obtained his Bachelor D certificate in 1986. With this level of education, Georges started his professional career, first at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at the University of Ouagadougou until 1988, then at the Faculty of Geography and Ecology of the State University of

Kharkov in Ukraine, where in 1994 he obtained (with brilliance) his M.Sc. in Geography and Planning, orientation Nature Conservation and Wise Use of Natural Resources—Wetland Management.

On returning to Burkina Faso he started to work with Fondation NATURAMA in 1995. After a one-year practical period, he held the following positions: Head of Projects (1996–98), Head of Conservation Programme (1998–2003), Director of Biodiversity Conservation (2003–11) and finally Coordinator of IBA Monitoring from September 2011. A passionate birdwatcher, he started his Ph.D. thesis on ornithology in 2003, which he was about to defend if death had not taken him so early.

Throughout his tour of duty at NATURAMA, he was dedicated to making a difference for both biodiversity and people. His contribution to nature conservation in Burkina Faso cannot